

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 4133

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SUBJECT: BALBIN'S MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT PERON

1. SUMMARY. AT MRS. PERON'S REQUEST, UCR LEADER RICARDO BALBIN HELD A TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT AT THE OLIVOS RESIDENCE ON JUNE 16. ALSO ATTENDED BY INTERIOR MINISTER ROCAMORA AND FOREIGN MINISTER VIGNES, THE MEETING PURPORTEDLY WAS CALLED SO THAT THE PRESIDENT COULD HAVE THE BENEFIT OF BALBIN'S VIEWS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE COUNTRY, AT A NEWS CONFERENCE HELD BY BALBIN FOLLOWING THE MEETING, HE SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED WITH THE PRESIDENT AMONG OTHER TOPICS THE SECURITY PROBLEM, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION, THE "BAD" ADMINISTRATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE AND THE NEED FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE TO ACHIEVE RESULTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 16, RICARDO BALBIN, LEADER OF THE UCR, CALLED ON MRS. PERON AT THE PRESIDENTIAL QUINTA TO REVIEW AT MRS. PERON'S REQUEST THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ARGENTINE POLITICAL SCENE. THE REQUEST FOR THE MEETING WAS TRANSMITTED TO BALBIN BY UCR BLOC LEADER TROCCOLI, WHO HAD IN TURN BEEN INFORMED BY RAUL LASTIRI ON JUNE 13 THAT MRS. PERON WISHES TO MEET WITH HIM. THE REQUEST, GIVEN TO TROCCOLI LATE FRIDAY NIGHT, TOUCHED OFF AN INTERNAL DEBATE WITHIN THE RADICAL PARTY ON THE ADVISABILITY OF ACCEPTING MRS. PERON'S INVITATION. SEVERAL UCR LEADERS VOICED CONCERN THAT A MEETING AT THIS TIME WHICH HELD NO PROS-
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PECTS FOR GREATER SUCCESS THAN THE APRIL 16 MEETING WITH THE

PRESIDENT WOULD REFLECT BADLY ON THE UCR. HERIBERTO KAHN, A LA OPINION JOURNALIST WITH EXCELLENT UCR CONTACTS, REPORTS THAT THE DECISION TO HOLD THE MEETING WITH MRS. PERON WAS DECIDED BY TWO CONSIDERATIONS. FIRST, BALBIN'S STATEMENT TO THE LEADERSHIP THAT FAILURE TO HONOR THE REQUEST AT THIS TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS WOULD BE SEEN BY MANY AS AN ATTEMPT BY THE UCR TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT; SECOND, FAILURE TO USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE STRONG CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY WOULD BE A FAILURE TO MEET THE PARTY'S RESPONSIBILITIES. ACCORDINGLY, WITH GREAT AND UNDISGUISED RESERVATIONS, THE UCR LEADERSHIP DECIDED TO GO AHEAD WITH THE MEETING.

3. FOLLOWING TWO-HOUR MEETING, BALBIN HELD A NEWS CONFERENCE AND TOLD NEWSMEN THAT HE HAD ENERGETICALLY CRITICIZED SEVERAL KEY ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY, HITTING PARTICULARLY HARD AT THE SECURITY QUESTION AND THE GOA'S MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA, ESPECIALLY RADIO AND TELEVISION. ACCORDING TO BALBIN, HE EMPHASIZED TO MRS. PERON THE NECESSITY FOR THE GOA TO "MONOPOLIZE" THE POLICE FUNCTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT WITHIN ITS OWN HANDS, AND REITERATED STRONGLY HIS EARLIER STATED BELIEF (APRIL 16) THAT "SOME" OF THE VIOLENCE PRESENTLY BEING CARRIED OUT IN ARGENTINA ENJOYED GOVERNMENT PROTECTION. DESPITE A FURTHER DENIAL BY MRS. PERON, BALBIN TOLD NEWSMEN HE HOLDS TO CONVICTION OF GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN SOME TERRORIST ACTS.

4. WITH RESPECT TO THE QUESTIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM AND GOA MANIPULATION OF RADIO AND TELEVISION, BALBIN SAID THAT HE HAD INFORMED THE PRESIDENT THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE WAS A "BADLY" RUN OPERATION IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE CORRECTION. INDEED, BALBIN SAID THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO CITE ONE GOOD ACHIEVEMENT OF THIS OFFICE AND THAT DESPITE HIS LONG-STANDING PRINCIPLE OF NOT CRITICIZING INDIVIDUALS, HE FELT COMPELLED IN THIS CASE TO CRITICIZE THOSE WHO RUN THE PRESS OFFICE. BALBIN WENT ON TO ENUMERATE FOR NEWSMEN THE OTHER AREAS OF CRITICISM HE OFFERED TO MRS. PERON AND CONCLUDED HIS PRESS CONFERENCE BY NOTING THAT HE HAD STRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT THE NECESSITY FOR THESE MEETINGS TO HAVE SOME RESULTS, FOR OTHERWISE, AS HE PUT IT, MEETINGS WOULD BE CONVERTED INTO A DIALOGUE WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE WHICH, IN EFFECT, WOULD MEAN NO DIALOGUE AT ALL.

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5. ONE CURIOUS ASPECT OF THE MEETING WAS THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTER VIGNES AT WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A MEETING DEVOTED ENTIRELY TO DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. ACCORDING TO THIS MORNING'S LA OPINION, VIGNES HAS BEEN GIVEN THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT DURING THE ABSENCE OF WELFARE MINISTER AND PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT LOPEZ REGA. THIS WOULD TEND TO CONFIRM EARLIER REPORTS THAT VIGNES IS NOW ONE OF THE MORE LOPEZ REGAISTALEANING MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. INDEED, HIS PRESENCE AT THE

MEETING IS SEEN BY SOME AS LOPEZ REGA'S WAY OF INSURING THAT ROCAMORA AND BALBIN DO NOT UNDULY INFLUENCE MRS. PERON DURING THE WELFARE MINISTER'S ABSENCE. ACCORDING TO BALBIN, VIGNES INTERVENED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE CONVERSATIONS TO PAINT WHAT BALBIN CHARACTERIZED AS AN EXCEPTIONALLY "OPTIMISTIC PICTURE" OF THE NATIONAL SCENE. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH NEWSMEN FOLLOWING BALBIN'S PRESS CONFERENCE, UCR LEADERS SAID BALBIN WAS SO ANGERED BY VIGNES'S CAUSTIC COMMENTS THAT HE CONSIDERED LEAVING THE MEETING. HE STAYED ONLY BECAUSE TO HAVE WALKED OUT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN AFFRONT TO THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND TO MRS. PERON PERSONALLY.

6. UCR LEADERS ARE NOW OPENLY STATING THAT IF WITHIN NEXT FEW DAYS NO ACTION IS TAKEN ON THEIR COMPLAINTS, THE PARTY WILL ISSUE A DOCUMENT SAYING THAT "DIALOGUE IS DEAD." BLAME FOR THIS WOULD OF COURSE BE PLACED SQUARELY ON MRS. PERON AND HER ADMINISTRATION.

7. COMMENT: MRS. PERON'S INVITATION TO BALBIN IS SEEN BY MOST OBSERVERS (PROBABLY CORRECTLY) AS AN EFFORT TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF GOING BACK TO DIALOGUE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS. IN SHORT, IT IS A FACADE WITH LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE SIGNIFICANCE. ONLY CONCRETE RESULTS OF MEETING SO FAR IS FACT THAT DURING LATE EVENING JUNE 16 GOA ALLOWED PREVIOUSLY BANNED TV INTERVIEW SHOW (PRERECORDED) IN WHICH UCR ECONOMISTS VOICED SHARP CRITICISM OF NEW ECONOMIC POLICIES TO BSCREENED. POSSIBLE UCR STATEMENT CONDEMNING GOA FOR FAILURE OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE WILL FURTHER STRAIN ARGENTINE POLITICAL FABRIC, THOUGH IF STATEMENT COMES AFTER WAGE HIKES ANNOUNCED ITS IMPACT WILL BE GREATLY DIMINISHED.
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